

# Body Image

## What is it?

Body image is how you see yourself when you look in the mirror or when you picture yourself in your mind. It is defined as one's thoughts, perceptions and attitudes towards their physical appearance.

## What does it encompass?

- ▶ Your beliefs about your own appearance (including your memories, assumptions, and generalizations).
- ▶ How you feel about your body, including your height, shape, and weight.
- ▶ How you sense and control your body as you move. How you physically experience or feel in your body.



Image 1

## Positive vs Negative Body Image

- ▶ **Positive body image** is a clear, true perception of your shape; seeing the various parts of your body as they really are. Body positivity (or body satisfaction) involves feeling comfortable and confident in your body, accepting your natural body shape and size, and recognizing that physical appearance says very little about one's character and value as a person. You do not have to match other's ideals or standards of body image to feel comfortable and confident in your own skin.
- ▶ **Negative body image** involves a distorted perception of one's shape. Negative body image (or body dissatisfaction) involves feelings of shame, anxiety, self-consciousness, preoccupation with appearance and engaging in behaviors like mirror checking, self-weighing, or avoidance. Those who experience high levels of body dissatisfaction feel their bodies are flawed in comparison to others, and more likely to suffer from feelings of depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and eating disorders.

(Adapted from: NEDA (2022). *Body Image and Eating Disorders*. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/body-image-eating-disorders>)

## Common Outcomes of Negative Body Image *(in addition to an eating disorder)*

- ▶ Depression and anxiety
- ▶ Increased risk of suicidal thoughts
- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Interpersonal and relationship problems
- ▶ Alcohol and drug use and abuse
- ▶ Decreased physical activity
- ▶ Low sex drive
- ▶ Stress
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Decreased motivation to seek help
- ▶ Perfectionistic tendencies and OCD
- ▶ Repetitive negative thoughts

## Impact on Eating Disorders

Body image problems and body dysmorphia are one of the leading risk factors for development of an eating disorder, and often a symptom of an eating disorder. Many individuals with an eating disorder place high value on their body shape and image as a determining factor for their own self-worth.

## Key Definitions

Body image can mean something different to everyone. Here are common terms or subcomponents of body image.

**Body Dissatisfaction:** unhappiness or negative thoughts with your body or certain parts of your body.

**Body Preoccupation:** obsessively thinking about or dwelling on what your body weighs or looks like.

**Body Checking:** repeatedly checking your weight, shape and/or appearance (i.e., constantly staring in the mirror or checking yourself in a phone screen, weighing yourself frequently, pinching parts of your body to assess fat and muscle, etc.).

**Body Image Avoidance:** avoiding situations that prompt concerns or anxiety about your body (i.e., swimming or wearing minimal clothing, refusal to be weighed, wearing baggy or oversized clothes as a "disguise", covering up or removing mirrors).

**Feeling Fat:** a sensation you carry more fat or are heavier than you actually are, regardless of actual body mass.

**Fear of Weight Gain:** irrational, illogical and often intense fear of gaining weight, which can cause symptoms of anxiety.

**Body Dysmorphia:** obsessive focus, shame and anxiety over nonexistent, perceived or imagined body parts or defects (often minor), resulting in behaviors to hide or fix these perceived flaws (i.e., cosmetic procedures, excessive exercise, avoiding or editing photos).

**Muscle Dysmorphia:** obsessive desire to have a muscular physique or build, or the fear of having an insufficient muscular tone or build.


(Adapted from: Break Binge Eating. (2023). *Body Image Statistics*. <https://breakbingeeating.com/body-image-statistics/>).





**For more information on eating disorders and nutrition questions, contact:**

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# Body Image

## Statistics

- ▶ Nearly 80% of young teenage girls report fears of becoming fat.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ 25% of male children/adolescents in the US were concerned about their muscularity and leanness, by expressing a greater desire for toned and defined muscles.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Nearly 1 in 3 health club users reported significant symptoms of body dysmorphia, of which 70% had an eating disorder.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Around 17% of adolescent boys perceived themselves to be underweight, despite being of normal weight.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Nearly 70% of adult women report withdrawing from activities due to their body image.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Around 50% of young 13 year old American girls reported being unhappy with their body. This number grew to nearly 80% by the time girls reached 17 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

## Improving Body Image Perception

- ▶ **Appreciate ALL that your body can do:**
  - ▶ Celebrate all the amazing things your body does for you.
- ▶ **Each day say one thing that you like about yourself or create a list:**
  - ▶ Remind yourself of the qualities you appreciate most about your body. Focus on positive qualities, read your list often, and add to your list as you become more aware of what you like about yourself.
- ▶ **Love ALL of yourself:**
  - ▶ Choose not to focus on specific body parts, see yourself as a whole person. Love yourself the way you are right now, not what or who you could be.
- ▶ **Surround yourself with positive people:**
  - ▶ You are more likely to feel good about yourself and your body when you are around people who support you, appreciate you, and recognize the importance of liking yourself just as you naturally are.
- ▶ **Avoid comparisons:**
  - ▶ You are unique and beautiful in your own way. Don't compare yourself or focus on other people's bodies – be YOU!
- ▶ **Challenge negative thoughts:**
  - ▶ Identify and challenge negative thoughts that criticize your body and impact your mood. Build yourself up by countering negative thoughts with positive and balanced thoughts and affirmations about yourself that work for you!
- ▶ **Wear clothes that make you feel good:**
  - ▶ Wear comfortable clothes that work with your body, not against it.
- ▶ **Become a critical viewer of social media messages:**
  - ▶ Understand that things we see in print or on television have been altered to perfection, everything is not as it seems. Pay attention to images, slogans, or attitudes that make you feel bad about yourself or your body and protest these messages.
- ▶ **Do something nice for yourself:**
  - ▶ Make time for a nap, find a peaceful place outside to relax, take a bubble bath, or do something that makes you happy to let your body know you appreciate it!



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**Text 1:** Kearney-Cooke, A., & Tieger, D. (2015). Body image disturbance and the development of eating disorders. In L. Smolak & M. D. Levine (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Eating Disorders* (pp. 283-296).  
**Text 2:** Calzo JP, Masyn KE, Corliss HL, Scherer EA, Field AE, Austin SB. (2015). Patterns of body image concerns and disordered weight- and shape-related behaviors in heterosexual and sexual minority adolescent males. *Dev Psychol*.

**Text 3:** Pearl, R. L., Puhl, R. M., Lessard, L. M., Himmelstein, M. S., & Foster, G. D. (2021). Prevalence and correlates of weight bias internalization in weight management: A multinational study. *SSM-population Health*, 13, 100755.

**Text 4:** Nagata, J. M., Bibbins-Domingo, K., Garber, A. K., Griffiths, S., Vittinghoff, E., & Murray, S. B. (2019). Boys, bulk, and body ideals: Sex differences in weight-gain attempts among adolescents in the United States. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 64(4), 450-453.

**Text 5:** Etcoff et al (2006). *Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the foundation of beauty beliefs. Findings of the 2005 global study*